

[Anna Alden]

25986

February 16, 1939

Anna Alden (white) (fictitious name)

5238 N.W. 24th Court

Miami, Florida

Divorced

Elvira [W.?] Burnell,

Writer

Evelyn [Werner?], Reviser

ANNA ALDEN

As I drive up to the Alden home I notice the large one-story stucco house has been freshly painted in cream color, new French windows are set in frames painted dark green, and I wonder if the Aldens still live here.

The place looks immaculate from outside. It is built on the front of the lot, and a short sidewalk lined with well-kept flowers and shrubs, leads straight to the house. On the wide, long, stone porch, built across the front of the house, there is a much worn sofa and a wooden rocker. The front door and screen door are closed; I knock and a young woman with a magazine in he hand opens the door.

“Does Mrs. Alden live here?” I inquire.

Library of Congress

"Yes," she replies, and calls, "Mom, someone to see you."

Anne Alden immediately comes to the door, carrying a very pretty baby in her arms.

"Well, fer the lan' sakes," she cries. Am I glad to see you. You're jist the one I was a-wanting to see 'bout somethin.'" Turning to the girl she explains, "This here's Miz Burnell, the govmint lady use to come a-visitin durin the FERA."

2

To me, "You ain't never met Ruthie — this is my married daughter from New York." We exchange greetings and Anna says, "Come, let's you and me set down here on the porch in the sun and talk. .it'll do my neuritis good. That old neuritis has got the best a me agin — that and indigestun. I kin fight the indigestun alright, but not t'other.

"Here, set down." As she pulls up the rocker, the baby squirmes around in her arms trying to get down. "I'll jist let this young 'un down here on the walk so we kin talk in peace." To the baby, "You stay right here now, Carolin' Ann, and don't run off."

"What a healthy looking child," I say of the baby who has blue eyes, blond hair and fat, smooth, pink cheeks. She is wearing a clean white dress, and is barefooted. "Ruthie's baby?" I ask as Anna sits down on the sofa near me.

"Law, no, you'll be surprised when you here it. I wish't 'twas Ruthie's, but it's Fanny's, my youngest. Times seems to git harder fer me. I got m'own younguns raised, 5 girls and 3 boys, now I start a-raisin the gran'chillun — looks like I'll have t'do it anyways. 'taint no choice in the matter.

"My Edith May's 30 years old — she's the oldest and real domestic; she does most of the housework. James, he's 22, is a-studyin in New York; Janet and Ruthie are both of'em married and live in New York; Victor, less see, he's 22, works at the Miami Country Club;

Library of Congress

Bruce's 20, and he joined the Navy; Evelyn's 19, and works when she can git it; my Anna and her 3 husband, Alex; are divorced.

"An Fanny, my youngest, she run off and got married 'fore she was 16 and this here baby's her's. She married a no-'count rasdal; makes me so mad jist to think of it!" Her thin lips close tightly; her expression is one of anger.

"Do they live here with you?" I ask.

"Not him, law NO!" she replies hastily. "He never did stay here none. After they got married he rented em a little house for theirselves. For a little while things went along pretty good, least I thought they wuz, an then one night a neighbor of their's come an [sez?], "Miz Alden, you'd better come an git you daughter 'fore that rascal kills her, fer he's a-beatin' 'er up plenty Hurry up an I'll take you," he sez. Well, I went with him jist like I wuz an found that rascal a-beating Fanny jist like the man [sez?], and I shore lit into him. He run out o' the house an I told Fanny to pack her clothes an come home with me, — poor kid, she wuz so scared, she wuz glad to leave there, him a-beatin' 'er an 'er that way too, a-carryin' this baby — he'd ought t'be horse-whipped, that's what.

"Well, I tried to git 'er in Jackson Memorial Hospital fer the baby t'be born'd cause I couldn't pay fer havin' no doctor, an that rascal, we couldn't find him nowhere. Twoudl not 'ave been fair to Victor neither, to keep 'er home to have the baby — he gives me most all his money to run the house. Well, bein as [how we?] live outer the city limits, they wouldn't 4 take 'er in Jackson an they didn't want to take 'er in [Kendall?] neither at first, but finally I got 'er in there — you know the house inside is jist about one big open space like it always wuz, 'cept now we have got a few rooms separated for sleepin — an there ain't no place here to have a baby private-like.

"After Fanny got home an up on her feet, here come that rascal a-tryin to meet 'er and make up (he'd come when I wuz out). Him making a fuss over the baby an 'like. I tole Fanny twould be best for 'er to git shet of him, but fore I knowed it Fanny, she's jist a kid

Library of Congress

and loves him so much (he's 27) wuz traipsin aroun with 'im agin an finally she went back with him. He rented a place, not so far from here. [Well?], I was a-hopin he'd do right by her now, he wuz a-workin steady over to the Maule place, an seemed like he'd changed. Then one day he come fer me, all excited like.

"Better come over quick, cause Fanny's awful sick," he sez. "Well I went right away an there she lay white as a ghost. 'What's the matter?' I sez to him.

"Well, I give her some medicine," he sez, a-hangin his head kinder shame-like an with that he walked out the house.

Fanny, then she tole me the truth. 'som, honest I didn't do nothin but take that medicine Jess give me,' an she pointed to a box on the dresser. 'Jess don't want me to have no more babies,' she sez.

"Look here girl," I sez. "You don't take no more of them there pills cause I don't want to t'dle or nothin' like it.

5

Your jist courtin trouble a'doin them kind of things, 'sides its wrong an you know you hadn't orta. I ain't so powerful religious but I shore know right from wrong, an much as I hate t'see you have another baby so quick, if your that a-way agin you'll jist have to bear it, that's that,' I tole 'er. I was so mad I don't know what t'do, but anyway she stopped a-takin the medicine. After that he treated her jist awful agin, he wuz so mad cause she listened to me — why he wouldna keered if she'd a died. I tole Fanny, 'If he starts beatin you, you come back home' — an it wuzn't long fore she and Carolin' Ann come back home and now she'll have another young'un in about a month. I dont mind em bein here so much myself, but taint fair to Victor, that's all."

"Did you let him get by with all this and not get the law after him?" I asked.

Library of Congress

"Well, Fanny, you know, she's still jist a kid, an loves him so, but this second time I tuk 'er to Jedge [Oppeborn?] bout it, cause that rascal, he wuz a-workin an they's no reason why he shouldn't support em. Well, the jedge, he got 'im to court in a hurry [an?] sez he must pay Fannie [\$6.00?] every week, or go to jail. He's a-payin it so fer, but the minute he stops, by gravy, I'll see he lands in jail ifen it's the last thing Anna Alden does," she says vindictively.

By this time Caroline Ann is tired of the little stones and glass jar she's been playing with. Bang! goes the jar on 6 the walk. We run down the steps and I pick her up while Anna picks up the glass. "Wonder what them there girls o' mine's doin anyway — readin magazines, I reckon. Looks like they could stop long enough to keep this youngun a spell so's I kin talk with you a little."

At this point Edith May comes from the back of the yard. She is a tall neat young woman, robust and cheerful; she is wearing n cotton print housedress and a slip-over sweater.

"This here's Miz Burnell," says Anna. "Yes, I remember her well," replied Edith May, [smiling?] pleasantly. "I'll never forget her gettin us a new roof on the house that time." To me, "Remember that day you came in while it wuz pourin' rain, an they wasn't a place you could set down without bein rained on? The roof just leaked like a sieve. I know you wished for a umbrella that day."

"How's Edith May getting along now?" I asked Anna, as the younger woman picked up the baby and walks to the back of the yard.

"Oh, she still does most the housework and cookin..you know a person can stay round the house so long that after a-while they jist nachelly hate to go out an meet people an that's how Edith May is right now. It's her I wanted to talk to you bout..can she git on that here music project, d'ye think? She knows a lot bout music, studied back up in North Car'lina

Library of Congress

and fer two years she taught pianny. She kain't 7 teach in Florida cause she ain't got no Florida certificate." I tell Anna where Edith May should go about this matter.

"Come set here awhile..I calls this my sun porch," says Anna pointing to a sunny spot on the south side of the house. An old blanket lay on the ground and several dilapidated wooden rockers were placed on it. "I've got so much to tell you," began Anna as we sat down in the rockers.

"I's anxious to hear about James," I say of her favorite son - the only one of her children who has fulfilled her ambition.

"Yes, I know, you always tuk sech a int'rest in all my chillun." At the mention of James' name her homely face lights with pride.

I say homely, yet [there?] is something fine in her worn, wrinkled face. The hardships she has known are etched about the eyes, the high cheek-bones and in the thin lips that close with a determined expression over poorly fitting false teeth. Her straight bobbed hair is dyed black but underneath and near the temple, the natural gray shows. She is tall and looks strong despite occasional attacks of neuritis. She is wearing a dark dress and a navy blue sweater which buttons down the front, dark tennis shoes and stockings.

"Well, James is still in New York," Anna begins.

"No doubt he is a finished lawyer by now," I say, recalling that James has been studying law.

8

"Lan sakes, law is only a branch of what James is a-studyin. When James gits thru studyin there ain't nobody a-goin' to know moren him," she says, swelling with pride.

"He tuk science an business administration at the University of Miami an he's workin fer a Ph. D. now in New York. He's employed by the Govermint in some kinder way, a-doin

Library of Congress

editorial work or somethin, an is payin for his studyin that way. He's real high up, he is, on some kind of a council..some of em think James is too young, but anyway they consult him bout lots of things. He can't send me much money, not regular, cause he's havin to pay for his studyin an 'sides, he needs good clothes an it costs a lot more to live in New York than it do here. He has a lot a fine friends whut help him too. He don't think nothin bout gittin married, says he goes to dances and takes girls out, but when they gits serious, he drops em like a hot potater.”

“How did you manage to git him thru the university here,” I ask, “when you scarcely had enough money for food?”

“You know, I always aimed for James to git him a eddication an I learned him a long time ago that he'd have to hoe his own row. When he got through high school his teachers wuz so int'rested that somebody went an talked to the President of the University bout him. Dr. Ashe's a grand man, he is.

“It didn't cost me a penny,” Anna continues. “He tole me ifen I'd jist let James go, without havin to bring any money 9 home, he'd see he got thru an wouldn't be no expense to me a-tall. Of course, James lived right there at the University an worked for em; he edited the Year Books, too, an in the summer time he'd work for the Florida Power an Light Co. James an me, we never could agree on whether it's heredity or environmint makes the man. James sez it's environment an I sez its heredity. He sez, ‘som, we gotta git away from the way we're a-livin to git higher in life,’ but I believe it's heredity cause on my father's side, all wuz men of high eddication. Why, three of my ancestors, [Harry, Martin?] an George — they wuz brothers,—all come over on the Mayflower, they did. I wuz a Mason ‘fore I married an that there Mason-Dixon line wuz named after my grandfather.”

At this point I interrupther to tell here why I am here.

Library of Congress

"I'll tell you anything ya want to know ifen ya don't use our right name. Fer my part I wouldn't care ifen it was in the papers, nor would t'others care, only James..he'd sure be made with me. He always sez 'somy, you talk too much.'"

I assure her that fictitious names will be used.

"Well, then it's all right. I'll start bout Gran'pa Mason..he tuk care a the Cape Lookout Lighthouse up in North Car'lina. My father had three sisters an two of em helped watch all day an t'other two all night. [Ma?] wuz married from the lighthouse. Grampa, he named Diamond [hoals?]...that's where the two seas meets. It's turrible dangerous fer boats..ifen 10 they git within a few feet of this place, they are dasht to pieces. Anyway, be hadd them shoals painted black an white an from that time on they wuz always painted that-a-way.

"I come from Morehead City, North Carolina. They's lots o' fish fact'ries, but its a real pretty place. Now-a-days them fish fact'ries has a different way o' doin things.. when I wuz a girl there used t'be a turrible smell from them, but now it's all changed. An them factory workers thought a heap a my mother..she died this past Christmas, wuz 83 year old, an they sent her a blanket o' white lilies. I couldn't go up there, I didn't have no money, an too, I wuz a-looking for James t' come home.

"I met Mr. Alden in Morehead City and me wuz married there, but he wuz born in Brooklyn New York. All my chillun wuz born in North Car'lina.

"Mr. Alden wuz a carpenter an buildin contractor by trade, an even with the big family we had there wuz always enuf for what we needed. I never could stand the way he'd run up bills for materials an not want to pay for em though.

"In 1924 there's a lot a talk bout the buildin goin on in Florida, specially Miami. I hadn't been feelin none too good, an the doctor he'd said I might get t.b. So'count a my health an the buildin prospects we all moved down here.

Library of Congress

"Mr. Alden could a done real well but he started in to drinkin an got careless bout his bills. He's all right long as he kin be boss, but 'f he has to do the work he jus ain't in it.

11

"When we first come here we rented a house then Mr. Alden he bought this lot for \$1,400 - he just made a part paymint - an drew up the plans for this house. [Soon's?] the roof wuz on it we moved in an've been here ever since. Wuzn't till the boom wuz over that he knowed he'd payed too much fer it, an lost intrust in gittin it rilly finished. right. These lots is all worth bout \$200 today.

"When the depression come Mr. Alden lost whut bizness he had, an livin in the house with him and the boys was jus awful. Bruce even run away f's home once. Mr. Alden wanted em to quit school an he'd day, 'tain't no use eddicatin them there kids so much — what's the good? Let em get out an earn money, an forgit about eddication.' An I'd allus tell 'im that the poor critters didn't ask to come into the world, an twas our duty to raise em proper.

"It got so bad that he packed his things 's left an I bin gittin 'long the bes' way I could. There ain't no doubt I've made a-plenty a mistakes, but I aint never shirked my duty an I got a clear conscience. I did so want the boys to get high places in the world — ifen I've failed in this, it ain't my fault.

"When Mr. Alden left he deeded the property such as it was to me. That was in 1928, an it wuzn't till two years ago that he asked me for a divorce. I give it to him, an he ain't married yet but I hear he's a-runnin round with women.

12

"I may not have much schoolin but I ain't so dumb as some people think I am. Mr. Horton said I wuz dumb but he learned different. He held the mortgage on this place an thought he could put somethin over me, but I showed him, I did..an I got the deed to it now, too.

Library of Congress

[When?] I had finished a-makin the last paymints he up an sez I still owe him \$300 on the lot an sez ifen I don't pay it to him, it'll 'pear as a lien on the property. Anyway he fenagled round an finally he come out here one day an sez, 'If you pay me \$50 I'll wipe the slate clean an give you a clear deed.'

"Well, I went an talked to Mr. Alden bout it, cause he wuz the one had dealins 'bout the place in the beginnin. When we got divorced he said I could have the house, but he shore didn't give me much, cause this place wuzn't nothin but a rock pile then, goin to rack an ruin. You kin see fer yo'self the work that's been done round here since you come a-visitin three year ago.

"Well, he said they wuz somethin in the contract bout the lot but he wouldn't have nothin to do with it so I raised the \$50 an went down to Horton's office. He got the deed out of a big safe an handed it to me an sez it's all ready fer me an clear..then somebody called 'im to the other end of his big office an I quick went down a piece to a man workin at a desk an sez 'Please look this deed over careful, I fergot my 13 glasses'..an the man sez 'It seems to be all right, but I guess you know there's a lien of \$300.' I said 'thanks' an set down quick again next to Horton's desk. When he come back I sez, 'sow, Mr. Horton, you strike out that there lien of \$300 fore I pay you one penny.' His face got all red and he wuz s'prised bout it..'s he acted mad too. But he got it straightened out all right, he did. He'd make a remark to someone I wuz dumb. He foun' out I wuzn't so dumb as he thought.

"I allow I may be ignunt; I only went to a little school till I wuz bout 16. We didn't have no grades like here an I don't know how fer I got, but I knew a-plenty jist the same cause they wuz good schools..why I studied some of the same things James wuz a-studyin at the University. Alex, my husband, he didn't git no eddication hardly.

"Speakin bout the University, did I tell yuh bout the night James gradja-ated?" asks Anna, back to the subject nearest her heart — James. She loves all of her children, but Victor, who always has been the mainstay of the family, receives little praise. Occasionally she

Library of Congress

will say, "Taint fair to Victor," but that's all. Bruce, the younger boy, has always been reluctant to contribute his earnings toward the support of the family.

Anna continues, "Well, of course yu'd know I didn't have a stitch of clothes fit to wear..jist like always. But think that kept me away? 'deed not..I shore went to that gradjation dressed to kill and I reckon that they wuzn't a 14 person there what looked any bettern I did."

"Where did you get your clothes?" I ask.

"Borrowed 'em, yuh might a-knowed. They's a lawyer here in town an him an his wife wuz always intr'Ested in James; well, she fitted me out in some clothes a her's an ifen there ever wuz a Cinderella, it shore wuz [me?] that night..I wisht you could'a seen me. An all [them?] there fine ladies an men wuz surprised when James interdooiced ne an they sez to him, 'Why, James, where you been a-keepin yore mother all this time..why haven't we met her fore this?' An James, he weren't shamed [at?] me that night, I know cause I shore wuz dressed up fine an looked swell ifen I do say it myself."

Edith May comes running to the front, searching for Caroline Ann.

"Why we ain't seen that youngun 'round here," Anna tells her. "Tho't you girls wuz a-watchin her round back, so's we kin talk in peace."

An ice truck rumbles down the road and stops next door.

"Lookin fer the baby?" the man calls from the wagon. "There she is in this back yard."

"I'll go git 'er," says Anna, runnin down the road.

I ask Edith May if I might go to the bath room and we walk into the house.

"It's just in back a that curtain," points Edith May.

Library of Congress

A beaver-board partition separates several rooms to the 15 right. All have cretonne drapery in lieu of doors. The bathroom is of fairly good size, and includes a second-hand bathtub, basin and toilet, the toilet seat badly cracked in 4 places. The plumbing has been installed within recent years. The tub contains soiled clothes. Nails have been driven in the wall and every available space has something hanging on it. A home-made medicine chest hangs over the lavatory. The room is fairly clean altho disorderly. As I push the curtain aside and step out of the bath-room into the living room I notice a young girl, in a cerise colored corduroy bathrobe, curled up in a rocker, deeply absorbed in reading a Love Story magazine. She is rather pretty, her black hair nicely waved, her finger nails carefully manicured with deep red polish.

"Evelyn, come meet Miz Burnell," says Edith May to the girl, who immediately gets up and comes over to me. The right sleeve of the bathrobe dangles loosely from her shoulder. As we start to speak, Anna walks into the room carrying Caroline Ann.

"This here's my daughter Evelyn," begins Anna, who does the talking for the family. "She had a job an wuz a-working in a office when she had to go and dislocate her shoulder." Evelyn smiles at me and resumes her reading.

"How did she do that?" I ask.

"Well she didn't fall or nothin..one mornin she wuz a-dressin for work an it seemed like the shoulder jist slipped out of its socket. The doctors in Kendall Hospital kep 'er 16 down there for weeks. Seems like the bone is slick or somehin. It'll be a long time fore that gits well, I reckon."

The large room in which we are standing serves as living room and dining room combined. The walls and ceiling are lathed but unplastered, and the room contains; an old fashioned upright piano, a white wicker settee, almost covered with a disorderly pile of clothing; a wide, open fireplace, an old fashioned rocker, a sewing machine, a round dining table

Library of Congress

covered with a white cloth and chairs drawn up close to it. The room has French windows that open on the front porch and the side of the house.

An ancient looking sideboard with cracked mirror stands against the wall which separates this room from the kitchen. It is cluttered with a variety of knickknacks and some glassware. Next to the sideboard a home-made wooden bookcase is filled with James' books. Among them I observe a set of Crowned Achievements of Literature; Knowledge; War in Europe and just above these on the wall are James' diplomas, nearly framed; one of them is from the University of Miami, "Bachelor of Science" dated 1934. Anna adds that James has still another diploma from the University of Washington or National, she's not sure which. Hanging on the wall, between the diplomas is a small, framed certificate of nursing which belongs to Anna. As I read these, Anna comes over to my side, "I got that while I wuz a-workin in the sewing room of the WPA. I took the course they give in the first aid an nursin, nursin always was in my line, I uster work out practical 17 nursin years ago.

"No diplomas from any of the other children, Anna?" I ask.

"Nary a one," Anna shakes her head sadly. "James he's the on'y one seemed to care much bout gittin eddicated in spite o' me tryin to drum some learnin into em. The others didn't even finish school..but James, he's smart as a whip..always wuz. Maybe the rest of em take after Mr. Alden's way of thinkin. (Fannie tells me on a later visit that she wouldn't go to school because the girls made remarks about her clothes. Her mother never had the money to pay for extra things needed in school, such as gym suits, and even though she got high marks in a subject her report showed "failure" if she couldn't buy the necessary outfit.)

"I don't mind as much bout the girls not a-finishin school. They didn't never want to go, but Bruce an Victor, I wanted them to go on to things higher up, like James..an maybe they would'a too, on'y I wuz havin such a hard struggle..yuh know, Mr. Alden offered to keep the two youngest girls over to where he live — he still has that there junk store next

Library of Congress

to the fillin station — but when I'd let them go stay with their pay, they'd come back home sick from the candy an stuff he'd give em. Well, I got to where I jist couldn't keep em in shoes nor clothes fit to wear to school but I wanted em to go so bad I went down to some charity place on Second Street to see if I couldn't git 18 some clothes for em. The lady there, she says "We only help people what's worthy." I felt like tellin her somethin, but I jist swallowed an went out without sayin a word. That wuz one time my pride wuz so hurt I couldn't answer. A younger woman who'd been a-listenin followed downstairs after me. She asked the boys names and ages an where I live an sez 'sow you'll hear from me inside of a week — an I'll let you know jist when to have them boys ready, fer I's sure we'll come an git em.' I sez, 'What you fixin to do? I wouldn't let them leave me.' She sez, 'Jist you trust me and don't say a thing.' Well, what'd she do but brung an their names up in the Kiwanis Club, an here two men come out an tuk Bruce and Victor downtown an bought em shoes an clothes fer to go to school.

"Well, fer a while they went to school all right..then one day Victor come home after school an sez, 'sommy, what is there to eat, I's so hungry.' I sez, 'son, there ain't nothin t'Eat in this here house, not even bread..but I got some cornmeal an I'll cook up some mush right this minute. That'll fill ya up.' With that he slammed his books down on the table..I don't know what come over the boy, for he's always so patient an takes things as they are. 'som, I's through,' he sez. 'so more school fer me. It's enuf James gittin eddicated..I's a-goin out an git some work, so help me God! Fore I could answer, he went out that there back door jist like a streak o' lightnin. Well [that?] day started his work as caddy on the golf links. I reckon he looked so desp'rate the man couldn't refuse him. He'd genrally make bout 9 holes a day an 19 git 50 or 75 cents — sometimes less, sometimes more..anyway twuz a help an he'd give me every penny. He stuck to that fer sev'ral years, always a-sayin 'som, don't worry bout me, I'll gi higher up some day, let me stick to this cause I like it.' Today he's a professional at the Miami Country Club. Gives me about all he makes to run the house..it's jist lately he's bought himself a little car an takes out enuf money to make his

Library of Congress

paymints. His health ain't so good now, though - he had a bad attack an the doctor said it was from his heart."

"Anna, which do you think comes first, to own a home or a car?" I ask.

"I think the home comes first; we ain't never had a car till Victor bought hisen jist lately.

"You'll never guess where Bruce is." I recall Bruce as a tall, pleasant boy, rather shiftless and irresponsible.

"Well, Bruce finally got in the Navy..thought they never wuz a-goin to pass him 'count of his feet..somethin bout his arches. He had to go to Atlanta..they wuz a lot of red tape. At last he passed an got though, an wuz he happy! Reckon he wuz glad to git away from home..boys is like that when they gits a certain age. First, I didn't want to sign for him to go, thought I might be makin a mistake, but he begged me so hard I went down and signed. Guess I done the best thing fer no never wuz satisfied round here..but it's been hard on Victor, it has, having to take [care?] of the family. Why, I ain't even heard from Bruce since last October..He did use to 20 send me a little money now an then, but he sez they take out a certain amount every month an that counts toward em gittin a high ratin when their time's up. The boat he's on is out by that island Guam, out there in the Pacific somewheres. Soon his four years'll be up; then he's a-hopin to be rated first class seamen an he wants to re-enlist. I talked to James bout it when he wuz home fer Christmas an he says to tell him to re-enlist fer sure, so I reckon I will, cause James, he always knows best.

"When he wuz home for Christmas, James went down to see one of them head men in the Florida Power an Light Co. to find out if they wuz any chance fer him to git anything worth while down here an the man asked him all bout what he's a-doin in New York an then he sez, 'James, you go back up there an finish studyin..there's better opportunit'y fer you in New York. Some day, if you really want to live in Miami, come back an we'll find a place for you.' So James tuk his advice and went back.

Library of Congress

"Do you still work in the sewing room?" I ask.

"No, I had to quit, but I jist hated to for I shore learnt a lot on that there [WPA?]. I like goin out to work much bettern keepin house an cookin; the money come in mighty handy, too. You know I aint no hand at keepin house, never wuz. Ifen there's sumpum to do like paintin, or grubbin round outdoors a-plantin that's jist what I like. Guess you noticed that outside the house has been painted. I did [it meself?], bought the paint 21 from a man, second-hand for a couple of dollars. See this here bookcase," pointing to the neatly painted bookstand, which contained James' books. "Well I made that while I wuz a-workin on WPA out to [Himleah?]. They had some classes in carpentry an I like that bettern sewin, so I up an asks Mrs. Brown, the boss-lady if I couldn't join an make me a bookcase an she said 'shore, an when I finished it she let me bring it home. I wuz so happy, cause all them there books of James wuz packed up in boxes. When he come home Christmas an seen how I'd fixed up his books he shore wuz pleased.

"Whut I started t'tell yuh wuz 'bout whut happened t'se while I wuz a-workin in the sewin room. I wuz runnin the sewin machine an, all of a sudden, somethin flew up and hit me in this here right eye..course I grabbed my eye it hurt so bad, an the next day it wuz all swollen an sore an the lady there she sent me to a doctor an he said a infecshin had set in. My whole face was sore all the way down..an swollen too..I couldn't hardly hear neither..fer weeks I couldn't do one thing even round the house.

"I's not gittin one penny fer it neither an I kain't see why not, but that there doctor sez twasn't from that bout the machine, so I let it go at that..yuh know I hate t'sake trouble 'specially with James a-working for the govment an gettin long so good. The boss lady in the sewing room, she wuz so nice t'se an all..she did fill out some papers for me though, 22 an I believe she tried to git a compensashun fer me, but I ain't never got none, not so fer anyways."

Library of Congress

Edith, May interrupts our conversation, "You didn't see the partitions Mom's I put up; we've made three bed rooms, c'son and see em," says Edith May.

The walls of these rooms are lathed but not plastered; each room has one window, on which a piece of cheap, but clean, cretonne hangs from the top; there are no shades.

"Mom and me sleeps here," says Edith May, pointing to a double iron bed painted white "an Carolin Ann sleeps in that crib next t'som's place." The bed is neatly made and covered with a plain white bed spread. The mattress of the crib is turned back to air. A home-made dresser, evidently made out of boxes, but very well done, stands against a wall and a mirror hangs on the wall just above it. "They showed Mom how t'sake that in WPA, an it comes in right handy for we had no dresser." It is nicely painted in deep cream color. An odd chair which matches nothing is next to the dresser. A small home-made rag rug is on the floor. All of the bed rooms are all in a straight line with the bath room, are about the same size, and more or less alike with unvarnished floors and an electric cord and bulb hanging from the ceiling.

As we re-enter the living room Anna says, "I want Miz Burnell to see the back porch we built, too. We'll go through the kitchen."

23

The kitchen is a small room and more cluttered and untidy than any room in the house. There is a three-burner oil stove and a single oven stands on the floor in a corner; a small oak ice box - Anna only buys ice in the summer time - so it is used chiefly to store things. Over the sink is a dish closet with two shelves; a small wooden table contains some dishes, canned milk, sugar, cereal, bread, and other articles. Dingy linoleum is on the floor. An ironing board stands against the wall; it is very much in need of a clean cover. An electric iron and several smoke-covered cooking utensils stand on the stove.

Library of Congress

"We use electricity, but our bill is jist the minimum amount," Anna tells me. "Don't mind the looks o' this kitchen, we jist kaint keep it in order, its so small and no place to put things a-tall. We eat at that table in the other room most of the time anyhow."

"What are your ideas as to diet?" I ask.

"Oh, I know all bout what we should eat, I learnt that on the WPA but the thing is, I ain't got the money to cook thata way. One of the nurses on the WPA, Miss Lambert, uster teach us bout how important it is to eat the right food and we'd make lists of what to cook and how to cook it an all that stuff. We do eat a lotta vegetables when they're cheap..an beans cooked with sowbelly; grits, an cornmeal. We kaint afford no milk tho, only canned milk."

The walls of the kitchen are unfinished; they are of cement 24 blocks poorly fitted together. There are large spaces thru which the sun can be seen. "Some day I's a-goin to plaster the inside of this house if I ever git enuf money fer the material," says Anna. "This kitchen's worst of all. Them 'grampuses' an scorpions crawl in through the spaces an they're somethin awful. I keep this here ammonia rite handy case any of us gits bitt'En."

"Why Edith May like t'died one time, jist from one a them grampus bittin her..it musta been pizenus fer sure. An' it had t'happen jist when I wuz called away to North Car'lina. My mother wuzn't expected t'live an they sent me the money t'come up there. 'twuz while I wuz there I got a telegram fer me t'come home ifen I kin leave [Ma?] cause Edith May wuz real bad off..sick. Looked like Ma wuzn't a-goin ter die after all, so I rushes back home. There wuz Edith May in bed, her face all swollin up..a infecshun had set in an the doctor sez it wuz almost bad as a snake bite. We had a turrible time with her..twas the condition of her blood too, when that there 'grampus' bit 'er.

"Come here, this here back porch is whut I wantid to show yuh. I built this m'self an Edith May helped git the coral rocks. We toted 'em all from over yonder." The foundation.of the 8

Library of Congress

x 10 foot porch is all solid coral rock. the top is neatly cemennted and three cement steps lead into the yard.

25

"Why, Anna, I had no idea you could build like this," I say in surprise. "Many a porch built by skilled workers is not as well made," and it's the truth.

"Reckon that makes up fer me bein sech a poor housekeeper, don't it?"

Beneath a large nut tree in the back yard is a wash-bench on which two tubs are placed upside down; a wash-board lies between the two tubs. Close by on the ground are two white porcelain laundry tubs which Anna bought second-hand and intends to connect with the plumbing some day. A wire/ clothes line estends from the tree, out to the back of the yard. Also, beneath the tree is an old cot on which Ruthie is comfortably stretched out reading a True Story magazine, unconscious of our presence. She is neatly dressed in a dark blue pleated skirt and white wool sweater, dark blue suede shoes and tan silk hose. She is rather pretty, her wavy black hair becomingly dressed in curls on top of the head, her finger nails manicured with deep red nail polish.

"Ruthie's a-visitin us for a spell; its kinder hard for her to git used to winters in New York," says Anna.

"Anna, what are your views on religion?" I ask as we sit down.

"Now that's somethin I don't know too much about. I wuz born a Baptist an when the chillun wuz small I sent 'em all to the Baptist Sunday School. None of us go to church reg'lar 26 now tho. I allows if a person does the right thing an treats others like they wanna be treated theirselves, they are just as good as them what's forever a-runnin to church. Ain't none o' my chillun religious, an I reckon it's my fault fer not bein more strict with em bout goin to church — but then agin there ain't none o' em whut's bad neither.

Library of Congress

"The girls like picture shows an go sometimes, but I never do..don't care nothin bout em a-tall. They like to read magazines too. I use my spare time a-fussin 'round the flowers..that gives me more pleasure 's anythin else. Victor likes to read detective stories an smoke his pipe..don't care fer girls a-tall. Since he's got a car he goes out more, tho."

"Are you interested in politics, Anna; do you vote?"

"When politics is mentioned that's when I keeps my mouth shet fer I don't know much bout that. But I do think President Roosevelt is the finest president we'll ever have, an Miz Roosevelt, she's jist swell. I think she's the smartest first lady we ever had..I like how she takes up fer us wimmin, too. No, I dont gen'lly vote, I's shamed t'say; James he gits after me bout that too; when he wuz home fer Christmas, he wuz a-telling me I must take more interest in votin."

"Well I must be going now, Ann," I say. "Let's walk around the back, and I'll say goodbye to the girls." Ruthie puts down her magazine long enough to get up and say goodbye to me. Edith May, who is still minding Caroline Ann turns to 27 Anna with, "Where do you suppose Fanny is staying so long?"

"She shoulda been back long afore this, I kaint figger out whut's keepin 'er so long," answers Anna with a worried frown.

"Well, goodbye Miz Burnell, come back an see us soon," says Edith May politely. Evelyn calls "Goodbye" from the French window as Anna and I walk along the side of the house and out toward the car.

"Now don't stay away so long this time," says Anna as I get into the car.

"I won't Anna, and I enjoyed visiting with you so much. I's glad the boys are doing so well and I's sure that some day you will have and easier life and get the benefit of your efforts in their behalf," I said.

Library of Congress

Anna smiles, "No, I ain't lookin for nothin like that. Yuh know I jist couldn't set down an be a lady ifen they did make lot'sa money. Reckon I'll be dead an buried afore that time comes, anyhow, but that's all right..ifen they'll jist do some of the things I want done, that's all I ask of em..reckon that's whut mothers are here on earth for anyway," and I realize more than ever the fine qualities Anna possesses.

"Hurry back..now don't fergit," she calls as I drive away.